

Abstract for 698 Project

Community college students are a very diverse group whose experience in using the print and electronic resources in an academic library can vary widely. Typical “one shot” library orientations do not begin to address the skills and competencies students will need to become information literate students and citizens, nor does it encourage or promote critical thinking. The American Library Association Presidential Committee on Information Literacy (January 10, 1989, Washington, D.C.) said “Ultimately, information literate people are those who have learned how to learn. They know how to learn because they know how knowledge is organized, how to find information and how to use information in such a way that others can learn from them. They are people prepared for lifelong learning, because they can always find the information needed for any task or decision at hand.”

This project takes the position that critical thinking is an essential component of information literacy; indeed, many of the Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education cannot be realized without the processes of reasoning and critical thinking. It is within this context that I suggest the problem-based learning approach as a good candidate for delivering the goals of information literacy and critical thinking. Thinking skills serve as tools for achieving subject-matter goals, just as subject matter serves as a vehicle and context for applying thinking skills; thus, students value learning new skills when they perceive a need to use them to accomplish a subject-matter objective. When framed as a problem relevant to the content of the course being studied (e.g. English 101, Sociology 101, History 101 , etc.) students identify the variety of types and formats of potential sources for information, or select the most appropriate investigative methods or information retrieval systems for accessing the needed information with which to solve the problem. Rather than the one-shot library orientation, it is proposed that librarians teach a 2-session library research component that employs a problem-based learning approach. PBL is characterized most simply as an educational approach in which complex problems serve as the context and stimulus for learning. Comparing students who receive the traditional one-shot orientation to those who receive the PBL component should make it possible to answer the question: what type of outcomes can be documented for community college students who are taught library research skills with a PBL approach.